

**POLARIZATION MAINTAINING DISPERSION CONTROLLED FIBER
LASER SOURCE OF ULTRASHORT PULSES**

Field of the Invention

[0001] This invention relates to modelocked fiber lasers and more particularly an ultra-compact integrated fiber laser with pulse width control in conjunction with concatenated sections of polarization maintaining and non-polarization maintaining fiber sections.

Background of the Invention

[0002] Modelocked fiber lasers are increasingly displacing traditional solid-state lasers in ultrafast optic applications. Modelocked fiber lasers can be packaged in very small spaces and also exhibit superior mechanical and thermal stability. In particular, passively modelocked fiber lasers allow compact designs because of the absence of bulky optical modulators. Fiber laser systems are pumped using diode lasers with an emission wavelength shorter than the fiber laser emission wavelength. For upconversion-type fiber lasers, the pump wavelength can be longer than the emission wavelength. Generally, similar to the majority of all laser systems, the pump wavelength differs from the emission wavelength; a fact which is well known in the art.

[0003] Passively modelocked fiber lasers often comprise saturable absorbers to initiate and stabilize the pulse formation process. Examples of laser systems using saturable absorbers in this manner are described in U.S. Patent No. 5,689,519 ('519) to Fermann et al., which patent is hereby incorporated herein by reference, and U.S. Patent No. 5,448,579 ('579) to Chang et al.

[0004] Semiconductor saturable absorbers have been implemented in modelocked lasers for a long time. Of particular interest are multiple-layer heterostructures as suggested in U.S. Patent No. 4,860,296 ('296) to D. S. Chemla et al. However, these early saturable absorber designs were restricted in that they contained nonlinear layers with a spacing of exactly an integer multiple of a predetermined optical period. Moreover, the incorporation of multiple layer heterostructures as suggested by '296 relied on semiconductor layers with a thickness of less than 500 Å in order to exploit quantum-confinement effects. Such thin

semiconductor layers generally restrict the bandwidth over which pulse shaping is possible with saturable absorbers.

[0005] A more workable saturable absorber solution was suggested in U.S. Patent No. 6,252,892 ('892) to Jiang et al., where a resonant saturable absorber for passive modelocking of lasers was described. Moreover, '892 suggests distributed resonant saturable absorbers comprising layers of saturable absorber material separated by semiconductor layers not restricted to a thickness of less than 500 Å. Semiconductor layers with a thickness greater than 500 Å are indeed useful for maximizing the pulse shaping action of saturable absorbers.

[0006] As is well known in the art of passive modelocking of color center lasers (Islam et al., IEEE J. Quantum Electron. Vol. 25, pp. 4254 (1989)), the optically excited carriers in semiconductor saturable absorbers generally relax with different time constants. A first time constant of approximately 300 fs depends on the charge carrier density and excess energy of the hot photo-excited carriers due to intraband dynamics, e.g. thermalization and cooling of hot carriers to the band edge. A second longer time constant of 1 ps – 30 ns is due to interband dynamics, e.g. the recombination of the carriers.

[0007] These different time constants can be easily realized if the hot charge carriers are excited well above (about an optical phonon energy above) the band edge. However, when the carriers are photo-excited at the band edge, the intraband contribution becomes weak due to the low carrier temperature. The excitation near-band edge is usually preferred in saturable absorber design because of the resulting resonant enhancement of the optical nonlinearity. In this case, the nonlinear optical response is governed by the interband dynamics including trap center assisted recombination and carrier relaxation with two different time constants cannot necessarily be observed and moreover, the ratio of carrier centers relaxing at the two different time constants cannot be controlled.

[0008] The interband dynamics are generally manipulated by introducing trap centers for photo-excited charge carriers either by arsenic anti-sites in GaAs-related material systems grown at low temperature or by implantation with ions. It has been readily reported (A.R. Hopfel, Ch. Teissl, and K.F. Lambrecht, Appl. Phys. Lett. 53, p. 12581 (1996)) that the trapping rate dominate the intraband dynamics in InP implanted with 200 keV protons (H^+) at

a dose of 1×10^{16} cm $^{-2}$, when excited with 1.7 eV photons. The carrier trap time can be sub 100 fs and the cw luminescence shows a non-Fermi distribution, indicating the hot carriers undergo a recombination process before they cool down to the band edge.

[0009] For ultrafast fiber lasers modelocked by saturable absorbers as described in U. S. Patent No. 6,252,892 it was shown that cw modelocking is initiated by Q-switched mode-locking in the very early stages of pulse formation. Hence, Q-switch pulses in the cavity are used for the start of modelocking and the support of Q-switch pulses by a slow optical modulation process in the absorber is useful.

[0010] Hence, the first longer time constant can be used to initiate pulse formation, whereas the second shorter time constant can be used to stabilize the oscillation of short femtosecond pulses. However, to date no control of the ratio of carriers relaxing at these time constants was possible.

[0011] In fiber lasers, soliton shaping and or nonlinear polarization evolution can further be used to stabilize pulse formation as described in '519. However, to compete on an equal level with modelocked solid state lasers in ultrafast optics applications, modelocked fiber lasers should include the following: 1) the output polarization state should preferably be well defined, 2) the construction of the fiber laser should preferably be adaptable to mass production, 3) the required optical elements should preferably be as inexpensive as possible, and 4) the design concept should preferably comprise saturable absorbers with well controllable parameters. It is with respect to these four factors that current, conventional, modelocked fiber laser technology still needs improvement.

[0012] Early modelocked fiber laser designs, as exemplified in '519, relied on non-fiber components for stable operation. Although these early modelocked fiber lasers could further accommodate devices that enabled wavelength tuning, a fiber pig-tailed output signal with a well-defined polarization state was not easily attainable. Similarly, '579 also included bulk optical components.

[0013] Improvements in the basic design of modelocked fiber lasers were made possible by the use of fiber Bragg gratings to control the dispersion inside the cavity or as replacements for cavity-end mirrors in Fabry-Perot-type cavity designs (U.S. Patent No. 5,450,427 ('427) to Fermann et al., which patent is hereby incorporated herein by reference).

Moreover, the incorporation of polarization maintaining fiber was further suggested in '427 to limit the sensitivity of the cavity to mechanical perturbations of the fiber. These designs allowed compact wavelength-tunable set-ups as well as synchronization to external electronic clocks. Wavelength tunable passively modelocked fiber lasers were later also described in U.S. Patent No. 6,097,741 ('741) and No. 6,373,867 ('867) to Lin et al.

[0014] Further improvements became possible by constructing cladding-pumped modelocked fiber lasers (U.S. Patent No. 5,627,848 ('848) to Fermann et al., which patent is hereby incorporated herein by reference).

[0015] The need for bulk polarizers was eliminated by the implementation of all-fiber polarizers as disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 6,072,811 ('811) to Fermann et al., which patent is hereby incorporated herein by reference. Such integrated modelocked fiber lasers could also incorporate fiber Bragg gratings for output coupling. The use of fiber Bragg gratings and all-fiber polarizers in the absence of any non-fiber polarization manipulating elements constituted a great simplification compared to single-polarization fiber lasers as discussed by DeSouza et al. (Electron. Lett., vol. 19, p. 679, 1993).

[0016] Limitations in integrated cavity designs arose from the need for fiber Bragg gratings written in polarization maintaining fiber to produce a linear polarization state of the output pulses. A high degree of laser integration has also been accomplished in the subsequent '741 and '867 patents. These designs lack high polarization extinction, all-fiber elements for polarization selection, and they rely on several concatenated intra-cavity polarization-maintaining fiber elements of extended length, which can induce the generation of satellite pulses at the fiber output. Indeed, as described in U.S. Patent Application No. 09/809,248, in the presence of concatenated fiber sections, pulse stability requires the single-pass group delay between the polarization axes of each fiber section to be larger than the generated pulse width. This is required to prevent any coherent interaction of intra-cavity pulses propagating along the two polarization axes at any coupling point, e.g., fiber splices. Such coherent interactions can generally produce temperature and fiber stress dependent instabilities, which are preferably avoided. Similarly, no all-fiber elements for controlling the spot size on an intra-cavity saturable absorber were described in '741 and '867.

[0017] Another method for producing an integrated cavity was introduced by Sharp et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,666,373 ('373)) where the use of a saturable absorber as an output coupler is described. A limitation with such designs is the required precision-polishing and AR-coating at the back-end of the saturable absorber to avoid the formation of satellite pulses inside the cavity.

[0018] The construction of high-power modelocked fiber lasers, as enabled by the use of multi-mode fibers inside a fiber laser cavity, is taught in U.S. Patent No. 6,275,512 ('512) to Fermann et al., which patent is hereby incorporated herein by reference.

[0019] A passively modelocked fiber laser particularly suitable for producing pulses with a bandwidth approaching the bandwidth of the gain medium was suggested in U.S. Patent No. 5,617,434 ('434) to Tamura et al. where fiber segments with opposing dispersion values were implemented. This design has limited functionality due to the presence of at least two long lengths of fiber with different dispersion coefficients for dispersion compensation, as well as the presence of non-polarization maintaining fiber, greatly complicating polarization control inside the cavity.

[0020] The design principles used in the patents mentioned above were reiterated in a series of recent patents and applications to Lin et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,097,741; U.S. Patent No. 6,373,867, and Application No. US2002/0071454). The designs described in Patent Nos. '741 and '867 lack appropriate all-fiber, high polarization extinction, polarizing elements that are generally required to minimize the formation of satellite pulses at the fiber output. Moreover, these patents do not describe all-fiber means to control the spot size on the intra-cavity saturable absorber; control of the spot size is required to optimize the lifetime of the saturable absorber. Equally none of the prior art describes ion-implanted saturable absorber designs with controlled ion depth penetration.

Summary of the Invention

[0021] The present invention is directed to a mass-producible passively modelocked fiber laser. By incorporating apodized fiber Bragg gratings, integrated fiber polarizers and concatenated sections of polarization-maintaining and non-polarization-maintaining fibers, a fiber pig-tailed, linearly polarized output can be readily obtained from the laser. By further matching the dispersion value of the fiber Bragg grating to the inverse,

or negative, of the dispersion of the intra-cavity fiber, the generation of optimally short pulses with a large optical bandwidth can be induced. In this regard, either positive dispersion fiber in conjunction with negative dispersion fiber gratings or negative dispersion fiber in conjunction with positive dispersion fiber gratings can be implemented. Preferably, the dispersion characteristics of the fiber Bragg grating and the dispersion characteristics of the rest of the intra-cavity elements are matched to within a factor of three. Even more preferably, these characteristics are matched within a factor of two, or within a factor in the range of 1.0 to 2.0. Also preferably, the Bragg grating has a chirp rate greater than 80 nm/cm. More preferably, the Bragg grating has a chirp rate greater than 160 nm/cm. Most preferably, the Bragg grating has a chirp rater greater than 300 nm/cm. To maximize the output power and the pulse repetition rate, the use of wide-bandwidth fiber Bragg gratings with low absolute dispersion is preferable. These fiber Bragg gratings are also used as end-mirrors for the cavity and allow the transmission of pump light to the intra-cavity gain fiber. The fiber Bragg gratings are conveniently produced using phase masks.

[0022] Alternatively, fiber couplers can be used inside the fiber cavity. Generally, sections of polarization-maintaining and non-polarization-maintaining fiber can be concatenated inside the fiber cavity. The non-polarization-maintaining section should then be short enough so as not to excessively perturb the polarization state. Intra-cavity sections of non-polarization-maintaining fiber preferably comprise all-fiber polarizers to lead to preferential oscillation of one linear polarization state inside the cavity. Similarly, when directly concatenating polarization-maintaining fiber sections, the length of the individual section should be long enough to prevent coherent interactions of pulses propagating along the two polarization axes of the polarization-maintaining fibers, thereby ensuring a maximum in pulse stability.

[0023] Saturable absorber mirrors (SAMs) placed inside the cavity enable passive modelocking. The saturable absorbers (SA) can be made from multiple quantum wells (MQW) or bulk semiconductor films. These saturable absorbers have preferably a bi-temporal life-time with a slow component ($>>100$ ps) and a fast component ($<<20$ ps). The realization of the bi-temporal dynamics of the optical nonlinearity is achieved by tailoring the depth profile of the ion-implantation in combination with the implantation dose and energy.

The result is that the carriers trap at distinctively different rates in different depth regions of the SAM.

[0024] Saturating semiconductor films can for example be grown from aluminum-containing material such as AlGaInAs, the exact composition can be selected depending on the sought band-gap (typically selected to be in the vicinity of the desired operating wavelength of the laser system) and it is also governed by the requirement of lattice-match between the saturating semiconductor film and an underlying Bragg mirror or any other adjacent semiconductor material. Compositional requirements enabling lattice match between semiconductors and/or a certain bandgap are well known in the state of the art and are not further explained here.

[0025] In aluminum containing semiconductors the surface area can induce a low optical damage threshold triggered by oxidization of the surface. In order to prevent optical damage of aluminum containing surface areas a passivation layer, e.g., InP, InGaAs or GaAs, is incorporated. SA degradation is further minimized by optimizing the optical beam diameter that impinges on the SAM. In one implementation the SAM and an intra-cavity fiber end can be either butt-coupled or brought into close contact to induce modelocking. Here, the incorporation of a precision AR-coating on the intra-cavity fiber end minimizes any bandwidth restrictions from etalon formation between the SAM and the fiber end. Etalons can also be minimized by appropriate wedging of the fiber ends. The beam diameter inside the SAM can be adjusted by implementing fiber ends with thermally expanded cores. Alternatively, focusing lenses can be directly fused to the fiber end. Moreover, graded-index lenses can be used for optimization of the focal size and working distance between the fiber tip and SA surface.

[0026] Wavelength tuning of the fiber lasers can be obtained by heating, compression or stretching of fiber Bragg gratings or by the incorporation of bulk optic tuning elements.

[0027] The use of bi-or multi-temporal saturable absorbers allows the design of dispersion compensated fiber laser operating in a single-polarization state, producing pulses at the bandwidth limit of the fiber gain medium. Additional spectral broadening can be obtained by launching these pulses into highly nonlinear fibers, allowing for the generation of

broad-bandwidth pulses with bandwidths exceeding one octave for use in optical coherence tomography or in precision metrology.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0028] FIG. 1 is a diagram of a cladding pumped fiber cavity design according to a first embodiment of the invention.

[0029] FIG. 2a is a diagram of a saturable absorber mirror according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0030] FIG. 2b is a diagram of a saturable absorber mirror according to an alternative embodiment of the invention.

[0031] Fig. 3 is a diagram of the proton concentration as a function of depth obtained after proton implantation into a saturable semiconductor film.

[0032] Fig. 4 is a diagram of the measured bi-temporal reflectivity modulation obtained in a semiconductor saturable mirror produced by ion-implantation with selective depth penetration.

[0033] FIG. 5a is a diagram of a scheme for coupling a saturable absorber mirror to a fiber end according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0034] FIG. 5b is a diagram of a scheme for coupling a saturable absorber mirror to a fiber end according to an alternative embodiment of the invention.

[0035] FIG. 6 is a diagram for increasing the optical bandwidth of a fiber laser according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0036] FIG. 7 is a diagram of a core pumped fiber cavity design according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0037] FIG. 8 is a diagram of a core pumped fiber cavity design using intra-cavity wavelength division multiplexers and output couplers according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0038] FIG. 9 is a diagram of a core pumped fiber cavity design using intra-cavity wavelength division multiplexers and a butt-coupled fiber pig-tail for output coupling according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0039] FIG. 10 is a diagram of a cladding pumped fiber cavity design using an intra-cavity output coupler according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0040] FIG. 11 is a diagram of a cladding pumped fiber cavity design using intra-cavity fiber output couplers according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0041] FIG. 12a is a diagram of a passively modelocked fiber laser based on concatenated sections of polarization maintaining and non-polarization maintaining fiber sections according to an embodiment of this invention.

[0042] FIG. 12b is a diagram of a passively modelocked fiber laser based on concatenated sections of long polarization maintaining fiber sections according to an embodiment of this invention.

[0043] FIG. 12c is a diagram of a passively modelocked fiber laser based on short concatenated sections of polarization maintaining fiber and additional sections of all-fiber polarizer according to an embodiment of this invention.

[0044] FIG. 13 is a diagram of a dispersion compensated fiber laser cavity according to an embodiment of this invention.

[0045] FIG. 14 is a diagram of a dispersion compensated fiber laser cavity according to an alternative embodiment of this invention, including means for additional spectral broadening of the fiber laser output.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

[0046] FIG. 1 represents an exemplary embodiment of the present invention embodied in a fiber laser cavity 100. A polarization-maintaining gain fiber 101 has a core 102 and cladding region 103. The fiber core 102 is doped with rare-earth ions, such as Yb, Nd, Er, Er/Yb, Tm or Pr, to produce gain at a signal wavelength when the laser is pumped with diode laser 104. The fiber core can be single-mode or multi-mode. The fiber laser cavity 100 further contains an integrated fiber polarizer 105 and a chirped fiber Bragg grating 106. Both of these elements, 105 and 106, are generally constructed of short fiber pigtails (e.g., 0.001 – 1 m in length), which are preferably fusion-spliced to fiber 101 using splices 107, 108 and 109. Alternatively, fiber polarizer 105 can be spliced in front of beam expander 110. When using multi-mode fiber, splice 107 is selected to match the fundamental mode in the gain fiber 101.

[0047] An exemplary integrated fiber polarizer in accordance with the invention comprises a polarization-maintaining undoped polarizer fiber (PF), with two orthogonal

polarization axes, where the loss along one polarization axis is significantly higher than the loss along the other polarization axis. Alternatively, a very short section (less than 1 cm) of non-birefringent fiber (i.e., non-polarization-maintaining fiber) can be sandwiched between two sections of polarization-maintaining fiber, where the polarization axes of the polarization-maintaining fibers are aligned with respect to each other. By side-polishing the non-birefringent fiber, e.g., down to the evanescent field of the fiber core, along one of the axes of the birefringent fiber, and coating the polished region with metal, high extinction polarization action can be obtained along one of the axes of the birefringent fiber. The design of side-polished fiber polarizers is well known in the field and not discussed further here.

[0048] For optimum laser operation, the fiber polarization axes of the PF are aligned parallel to the polarization axes of the gain fiber 101. To ensure stable modelocked operation, the polarizer preferably effectively eliminates satellite pulses generated by any misalignment between the polarization axes of the PF and the gain fiber 101.

[0049] Neglecting any depolarization in the all-fiber polarizer itself, it can be shown by applying a Jones matrix calculation method that for a misalignment of the polarization axes of gain fiber 101 and fiber polarizer 105 by α degrees, the linear reflectivity R from the right-hand side of the cavity varies approximately between $R = 1 - 0.5 \sin^2 2\alpha$ and $R = 1$ depending on the linear phase in the gain fiber 101. If the group delay along the two polarization axes of the gain fiber is larger than the intra-cavity pulse width, any satellite pulse is suppressed by $\sin^4 \alpha$ after transmission through the polarizer. Typical fiber splicing machines can align polarization-maintaining fibers with an angular accuracy of less than $\pm 2^\circ$; hence any reflectivity variation due to drifts in the linear phase between the two polarization eigenmodes of fiber 101 can be kept down to less than 3×10^{-3} , whereas (for sufficiently long fibers) any satellite pulses obtained after transmission through the polarizer can be kept down to less than 6×10^{-6} when using an integrated polarizer.

[0050] The chirped fiber Bragg grating 106 is preferably spliced to the PF 105 at splice position 108 and written in non-polarization-maintaining fiber. In order to avoid depolarization in the fiber Bragg grating, the Bragg grating pig-tails are preferably kept very short, e.g., a length smaller than 2.5 cm is preferable between splice locations 108 and 109. To obtain a linear polarization output, a polarization-maintaining fiber pig-tail is spliced to

the left-side of the fiber Bragg grating at splice location 109. The laser output is obtained at a first fiber (or cavity) end 111, which is preferably angle-cleaved to avoid back-reflections into the cavity.

[0051] Fiber Bragg grating 106 serves two functions. First, it is used as an output mirror (i.e., it feeds part of the signal back to the cavity) and, second, it controls the amount of cavity dispersion. In the present implementation, the chirped fiber Bragg grating has a negative (soliton-supporting) dispersion at the emission wavelength in the wavelength region near 1060 nm and it counter-balances the positive material dispersion of the intra-cavity fiber. To produce the shortest possible pulses (with an optical bandwidth comparable to or larger than the bandwidth of the gain medium), the absolute value of the grating dispersion is selected to be within the range of 0.5 – 10 times the absolute value of the intra-cavity fiber dispersion. Moreover, the fiber Bragg grating is apodized in order to minimize any ripple in the reflection spectrum of the grating. Accordingly, the oscillation of chirped pulses is enabled in the cavity, minimizing the nonlinearity of the cavity and maximizing the pulse energy. Chirped pulses are characterized in having a pulse width which is longer than the pulse width that corresponds to the bandwidth limit of the corresponding pulse spectrum. For example the pulse width can be 50%, 100%, 200% or more than 1000% longer than the bandwidth limit.

[0052] Alternatively, the oscillation of chirped pulses is also enabled by using negative dispersion fiber in conjunction with positive dispersion chirped fiber Bragg gratings. Pulses with optical bandwidth comparable to the bandwidth of the gain medium can also be obtained with this alternative design.

[0053] A SAM 112 at a second distal fiber end 113 completes the cavity. In an exemplary implementation a thermally expanded core (TEC) 110 is implemented at cavity end 113 to optimize the modelocking performance and to allow close coupling of the SAM 112 to the second fiber end 113 with large longitudinal alignment tolerances. Etalon formation between the fiber end 113 and the SAM 112 is prevented by an anti-reflection coating deposited on fiber end 113 (not separately shown). In the vicinity of the second fiber end 113, fiber 101 is further inserted into ferrule 114 and brought into close contact with

SAM 112. Fiber 101 is subsequently fixed to ferrule 114 using, for example, epoxy and the ferrule itself is also glued to the SAM 112.

[0054] The pump laser 104 is coupled into the gain fiber 101 via a lens system comprising, for example, two lenses 115 and 116 and a V-groove 117 cut into fiber 101. Such side-coupling arrangements are described in, for example, U.S. Patent No. 5,854,865 ('865) to L. Goldberg et al. Alternatively, fiber couplers can be used for pump light coupling.

[0055] An exemplary design for a SAM in accordance with the present invention is shown in FIG. 2a. For example, SAM 200 includes an InGaAsP layer 201 with a thickness of 50 – 2000 nm. Further, layer 201 is grown with a bandedge in the 1 μ m wavelength region; the exact wavelength is defined by the sought emission wavelength of the fiber laser and can vary between 1.0 – 1.6 μ m. The InGaAsP layer 201 is further coated or processed with a reflective material such as Au or Ag. A dielectric mirror or semiconductor Bragg reflector 202 is located beneath layer 201 and the entire structure is attached to heat sink 203, based on, for example, metal, diamond or sapphire.

[0056] In order to cover a broad spectral range (e.g., greater than 100 nm) metallic mirrors are preferred. When using a metallic mirror it is advantageous to remove the substrate (InP) by means of etching. When using HCl as an etching solvent the etching selectivity between InGaAsP and InP can be low, depending on the compound composition of InGaAsP. An etch-stop layer is beneficial between the substrate and the InGaAsP layer. InGaAs can be a proper etch-stop layer. When adding an InGaAs layer with a band-gap wavelength shorter than 1.03 μ m, lattice relaxations can be avoided by keeping the thickness below 10 nm.

[0057] The InGaAsP layer can further be anti-reflection coated with layer 204 on its upper surface to optimize the performance of the SAM. Because of the saturable absorption by InGaAsP, the reflectivity of the SAM increases as a function of light intensity, which in turn favors the growth of short pulses inside the laser cavity. The absence of Al in the saturable absorber layer prevents oxidization of the semiconductor surfaces in ambient air and thus maximizes the life-time and power handling capability of the structure.

[0058] Instead of InGaAsP, any other Al-free saturable semiconductor can also be used in the construction of the SAM. Alternatively, Al-containing semiconductors can be

used in the SAM with appropriately passivated surface areas. Surface passivation can, for example, be accomplished by sulfidization of the semiconductor surface, encapsulating it with an appropriate dielectric or with an Al-free semiconductor cap layer. An AlGaInAs absorber layer grown lattice-matched on InP can be surface-passivated with a thin (about 10 nm range) cap layer of InP. AlGaInAs with a higher bandgap energy than the absorber layer can also be used for a semiconductor Bragg reflector in combination with InP. Among concepts for semiconductor Bragg mirrors lattice-matched to InP, an AlGaInAs/InP combination has an advantage over an InGaAsP/InP Bragg reflector due to its high refractive index contrast.

[0059] Instead of a bulk semiconductor saturable absorber, a MQW saturable absorber structure as shown in FIG. 2b may also be used. In this case, the SAM 205 conveniently comprises MQW structures 206, 207 and 208 separated by passive spacer layers 209 – 212 in order to increase the saturation fluence and depth-selective ion-implantation concentration of each MQW section. Additional MQW structures can further be used, similarly separated by additional passive spacer layers. To reduce the wavelength and location sensitivity of the MQW saturable absorbers, the width of the spacer layers varies from spacer layer to spacer layer. Furthermore, multiple bulk layers with thicknesses larger than 500 Å can replace the MQW structure. The MQW layers, in turn, can contain several layers of quantum wells and barriers such as, for example, InGaAs and GaAs, respectively. Top surface 209 can further be anti-reflection coated (not shown); a reflective structure is obtained by including mirror structure 213. The entire structure can be mounted on heat sink 214.

[0060] The control of the response time of the saturable absorption for concomitant existence of fast and slow time constants is realized by introducing carrier trap centers with depth controlled H⁺ (or other ions) implantation. The implantation energy and dose are adjusted such that part of the absorbing semiconductor film contains a minimal number of trap centers. For example the semiconductor layer with the minimal number of trap centers can be selected to be at the edge of the optical penetration range of exciting laser radiation. Such a design serves only as an example and alternatively any semiconductor area within the optical penetration range can be selected to contain a minimal number of trap

centers. Hence distinctive bi-temporal carrier relaxation is obtained in the presence of optical excitation. As an illustration of depth selective ion implantation, Fig. 3 shows the measurement of the depth profile of H⁺ ion implantation of an InGaAsP absorber film taken from secondary ion mass spectroscopy (SIMS).

[0061] The obtained bi-temporal carrier life-time obtained with the semiconductor film with a proton concentration as shown in Fig. 3, is further illustrated in Fig. 4. Here the reflectivity modulation (dR/R_0) of a semiconductor saturable mirror due to excitation of the saturable mirror with a high energy short pulse at time $t = 0$ is shown as a function of time delay. The measurement was obtained with a pump-probe technique, as well known in the art. Fig. 4 clearly displays the bi-temporal response time due to fast (<1 ps) and slow (>>100 ps) recovery. The distinctive fast response originates from the depth region with high trap concentration, while the slow component results from the rear depth region with a much lower trap center concentration.

[0062] When employing this absorber in the laser system described with respect to Fig. 1, Q-switched mode-locking is obtained at intracavity power levels of a few mW. At the operating pump power level, stable cw mode-locking evolving from Q-switch mode-locking is observed. In contrast, no Q-switching and no mode-locking operation is obtained with the same semiconductor material implanted uniformly with protons without bi-temporal carrier relaxation (exhibiting only fast carrier relaxation).

[0063] We emphasize that the description for Fig.3 and Fig.4 is to serve as an example in controlling 1) the fast time constant, 2) the slow time constant, 3) the ratio of the fast and slow time constants, 4) the amplitude of the fast response, 5) the amplitude of the slow response, and finally 6) the combination of all of the above by ion implantation in a saturable absorber. Thus, the concept depicted hereby can be applicable for any type of laser modelocked with a saturable absorber. Specifically, in the presence of un-avoidable large spurious intra-cavity reflections such as in fiber lasers or thin disk lasers (F. Brunner et al., Sub-50 fs pulses with 24 W average power from a passively modelocked thin disk Yb:YAG laser with nonlinear fiber compression, Conf. on Advanced Solid State Photonics, ASSP, 2003, paper No.: TuA1), the disclosed engineerable bi-temporal saturable absorbers can greatly simplify and stabilize short pulse formation.

[0064] The preferred implantation parameters for H⁺ ions in GaAs or InP related materials including MQW absorbers are as follows: The doses and the implantation energies can be selected from 10¹² cm⁻² to 10¹⁷ cm⁻² and from 5 keV to 200 keV, respectively, for an optically absorbing layer thickness between 50 nm and 2000 nm. For MQW absorbers, the selective ion-implantation depth is rather difficult to measure because the shallow MQW falls into the implantation peak in Fig. 3. However, with the separation of MQW sections with spacers 209-212 (as shown in Fig. 2) it is feasible to employ depth selective ion implantation. For arsenic implantation, the implantation parameters for 50 – 2000 nm absorbing layer spans from 10¹² cm⁻² to 10¹⁷ cm⁻² for the dosage and an implantation energy range of 100 keV to 1000 keV. In case of MQW saturable absorbers, the implantation range is preferably selected within the total thickness of the semiconductor layer structure containing MQW sections and spacers. In addition to H⁺ and arsenic, any other ions such as for example Be can be implanted with controlled penetration depth by adjusting the above recipes according to the stability requirements of the desired laser.

[0065] FIG. 5a illustrates an alternative implementation of the fiber end and SAM coupling in Fig. 1. Here cavity 300 comprises an angle-polished thermal-diffusion expanded core (TEC) 301. Fiber end 302 is brought into close contact with SAM 303 and fiber 304 is rotated inside ferrule 305 to maximize the back reflection from SAM 303. Ferrule 305 is further angle-polished and SAM 303 is attached to the angle-polished surface of ferrule 305. As shown in Fig. 5a, fiber 304 is conveniently glued to the left-hand side of ferrule 305. A wedge-shaped area between the fiber surface 302 and SAM 303 greatly reduces the finesse of the etalon between the two surfaces, which is required for optimum modelocked laser operation.

[0066] Instead of TEC cores, more conventional lenses or graded index lenses can be incorporated between the fiber end and the SAM to optimize the beam diameter on the SAM. Generally, two lenses are required. A first lens collimates the beam emerging from the fiber end, and a second lens focuses the beam onto the SAM. According to present technology, even conventional lenses allow the construction of a very compact package for the second fiber end. An implementation with two separate collimation and focusing lenses is not separately shown. To minimize unwanted backreflections into the fiber cavity and to

minimize the number of components, a single lens can be directly fused to the fiber end as depicted in FIG. 5b. As shown in Fig. 5b, assembly 306 contains SAM 303 and fiber 304 as well as lens 307, which focuses the optical beam onto the SAM. Lens 307 can also include a graded index lens.

[0067] To minimize aberrations in assembly 306, an additional lens can also be incorporated between lens 307 and SAM 303. Such an assembly is not separately shown. Alternatively, a lens can be directly polished onto fiber 304; however, such an arrangement has the disadvantage that it only allows a beam size on the SAM which is smaller than the beam size inside the optical fiber, thereby somewhat restricting the design parameters of the laser. To circumvent this problem, a lens surface can be directly polished onto the surface of a TEC; such an implementation is not separately shown. Another alternative is to exploit a graded-index lens design attached directly onto the fiber tip to vary the beam size on the SAM. In the presence of air-gaps inside the oscillator a bandpass filter 308 can be incorporated into the cavity, allowing for wavelength tuning by angular rotation as shown, for example, in FIG. 5b.

[0068] Passive modelocking of laser cavity 100 (FIG. 1) is obtained when the pump power exceeds a certain threshold power. In a specific, exemplary, implementation, polarization-maintaining fiber 101 was doped with Yb with a doping level of 2 weight %; the doped fiber had a length of 1.0 m; the core diameter was 8 μm and the cladding diameter was 125 μm . An additional 1.0 m length of undoped polarization-maintaining fiber was also present in the cavity. The overall (summed) dispersion of the two intra-cavity fibers was approximately $+0.09 \text{ ps}^2$. In contrast, the fiber grating 106 had a dispersion of -0.5 ps^2 , a spectral bandwidth of 10 nm and a reflectivity of 50%. The grating was manufactured with a phase mask with a chirp rate of 80 nm/cm.

[0069] When pumping with an optical power of 1.0 W at a wavelength of 910 nm, the laser produced short chirped optical pulses with a full width half maximum width of 1.5 ps at a repetition rate of 50 MHz. The average output power was as high as 10 mW. The pulse bandwidth was around 2 nm and hence the pulses were more than two times longer than the bandwidth-limit which corresponds to around 800 fs.

[0070] Alternatively, a fiber grating 106 with a dispersion of -0.1 ps^2 , closely matching the dispersion of the intra-cavity fiber, was implemented. The fiber grating had a reflectivity of 9% and a spectral bandwidth of 22 nm centered at 1050 nm. The grating was manufactured with a phase mask with a chirp rate of 320 nm/cm. The laser then produced chirped optical pulses with a full-width half maximum width of 1.0 ps at a repetition rate of 50 MHz with an average power of 25 mW. The pulse spectral bandwidth was around 20 nm and thus the pulses were around 10 times longer than the bandwidth limit, which corresponds to around 100 fs. The generation of pulses with a pulse width corresponding to the bandwidth limit was enabled by the insertion of a pulse compressing element; such elements are well known in the state of the art and are not further discussed here. The generation of even shorter pulses can be generated with fiber gratings with a bandwidth of 40 nm (and more) corresponding to (or exceeding) the spectral gain bandwidth of Yb fibers.

[0071] Shorter pulses or pulses with a larger bandwidth can be conveniently obtained by coupling the fiber output into another length of nonlinear fiber as shown in FIG. 6. Here, assembly 400 contains the integrated fiber laser 401 with pig-tail 402. Pig-tail 402 is spliced (or connected) to the nonlinear fiber 403 via fiber splice (or connector) 404. Any type of nonlinear fiber can be implemented. Moreover, fiber 403 can also comprise a fiber amplifier to further increase the overall output power.

[0072] In addition to cladding pumped fiber lasers, core-pumped fiber lasers can be constructed in an integrated fashion. Such an assembly is shown in FIG. 7. The construction of cavity 500 is very similar to the cavity shown in FIG. 1. Cavity 500 contains polarization-maintaining fiber 501 and integrated fiber polarizer 502. Fiber 501 is preferably single-clad, though double-clad fiber can also be implemented. The chirped fiber grating 503 again controls the dispersion inside the cavity and is also used as the output coupler. Fiber 501, fiber polarizer 502, fiber grating 503 and the polarization-maintaining output fiber are connected via splices 504 – 506. The output from the cavity is extracted at angle-cleaved fiber end 507. SAM 508 contains anti-reflection coated fiber end 509, located at the output of the TEC 510. Fiber 501 and SAM 508 are fixed to each other using ferrule 511. The fiber laser is pumped with pump laser 512, which is injected into the fiber via wavelength-division multiplexing coupler 513.

[0073] In addition to chirped fiber gratings, unchirped fiber gratings can also be used as output couplers. Such cavity designs are particularly interesting for the construction of compact Er fiber lasers. Cavity designs as discussed with respect to Figs. 1 and 7 can be implemented and are not separately shown. In the presence of fiber gratings as shown in Figs. 1 and 7, the fiber gratings can also be used as wavelength tuning elements. In this, the fiber gratings can be heated, compressed or stretched to change their resonance condition, leading to a change in center wavelength of the laser output. Techniques for heating, compressing and stretching the fiber gratings are well known. Accordingly, separate cavity implementations for wavelength tuning via a manipulation of the fiber grating resonance wavelength are not separately shown.

[0074] In the absence of a fiber grating, a mirror can be deposited or attached to one end of the fiber cavity. The corresponding cavity design 600 is shown in Fig. 8. Here, it is assumed that the fiber 601 is core pumped. The cavity comprises an intra-cavity all-fiber polarizer 602 spliced to fiber 601 via splice 603. Another splice 604 is used to couple WDM 605 to polarizer 602. Polarization maintaining WDM 605 is connected to pump laser 606, which is used to pump the fiber laser assembly. Saturable absorber mirror assembly 607, as described previously with respect to Figs. 1 and 7, terminates one cavity end and is also used as the passive modelocking element.

[0075] A second fiber polarizer 608 is spliced between WDM 605 and polarization-maintaining output coupler 609 to minimize the formation of satellite pulses, which can occur when splicing sections of polarization maintaining fiber together without perfect alignment of their respective polarization axes, as discussed in U.S. Patent Application No. 09/809,248. Typically, coupler 609 has a coupling ratio of 90/10 to 50/50, i.e., coupler 609 couples about 90 – 50% of the intra-cavity signal out to fiber pig-tail 610. Pig-tail 610 can be spliced to a fiber isolator or additional fiber amplifiers to increase the pulse power. The second cavity end is terminated by mirror 611. Mirror 611 can be directly coated onto the fiber end face or, alternatively, mirror 611 can be butt-coupled to the adjacent fiber end.

[0076] The increase in stability of cavity 600 compared to a cavity where the output coupler fiber, the WDM fiber and gain fiber 601 are directly concatenated without

intra-fiber polarizing stages, can be calculated using a Jones matrix formalism even when coherent interaction between the polarization axes of each fiber section occurs.

[0077] Briefly, due to the environmental sensitivity of the phase delay between the polarization eigenmodes of each fiber section, for N directly concatenated polarization-maintaining fibers the reflectivity of a fiber Fabry-Perot cavity can vary between $R = 1$ and $R = 1 - (N \times \alpha)^2$, where α is the angular misalignment between each fiber section. Further, it is assumed that α is small (i.e., $\alpha \ll 10^\circ$) and identical between each pair of fiber sections. Also, any cavity losses are neglected. In fact, it is advantageous to analyze the possible leakage L into the unwanted polarization state at the output of the fiber cavity. L is simply given by $L = 1 - R$. For the case of N concatenated fiber sections, the maximum leakage is thus $(N \times \alpha)^2$.

[0078] In contrast, a cavity containing $N - 1$ polarizers in-between N sections of polarization-maintaining fiber is more stable, and the maximum leakage is $L = 2 \times (N-1) \alpha^2$. Here, any depolarization in the fiber polarizers itself is neglected. For instance, in a case where $N = 3$, as in cavity 600, the leakage L into the wrong polarization axis is $2 \times (3 - 1) / 3^3 = 4/9$ times smaller compared to a cavity with three directly concatenated fiber sections. This increase in stability is very important in manufacturing yield as well as in more reproducible modelocked operation in general.

[0079] In constructing a stable laser, it is also important to consider the construction of WDM 605 as well as output coupler 609. Various vendors offer different implementations. An adequate optical representation of such general polarization-maintaining fiber elements is shown in Fig. 9. It is sufficient to assume that a general coupler 700 comprises two polarization-maintaining fiber sections (pig-tails) 701, 702 with a coupling point 703 in the middle, where the two polarization axes of the fiber are approximately aligned with respect to each other.

[0080] In order to ensure pulse stability inside a passively modelocked laser, the group-velocity walk-off along the two polarization axes of fiber sections 701, 702 should then be longer than the full-width half maximum (FWHM) pulse width of the pulses generated in the cavity. For example, assuming a birefringent fiber operating at a wavelength of 1550 nm with a birefringence of 3×10^{-4} corresponding to a polarization beat length of 5

mm at 1550 nm, the stable oscillation of soliton pulses with a FWHM width of 300 fs requires pig-tails with a length greater than 29 cm. For 500 fs pulses, the pig-tail length should be increased to around 50 cm.

[0081] Referring back to Fig. 8, if a fiber pig-tailed output is not required, mirror 611 as well as output coupler 609 can be omitted, and the 4% reflection from the fiber end adjacent to mirror 611 can be used as an effective output mirror. Such an implementation is not separately shown.

[0082] Alternatively, a fiber-pig-tail can be butt-coupled to mirror 611 and also be used as an output fiber pigtail. Such an implementation is shown in Fig. 10. Here, cavity 800 comprises core-pumped fiber 801, fiber polarizer 802 and SAM assembly 803. The laser is pumped via WDM 804 connected to pump laser 805. An appropriate mirror (or mirror coating) 806 is attached to one end of the cavity to reflect a part of the intra-cavity light back to the cavity and to also serve as an output mirror element. Fiber pig-tail 807 is butt-coupled to the fiber laser output mirror 806 and an additional ferrule 808 can be used to stabilize the whole assembly. The polarization axes of fiber 807 and 801 can be aligned to provide a linearly polarized output polarization. Again, applying a Jones matrix analysis, cavity 800 is more stable than cavity 600, because it comprises only one intra-fiber polarizing section. The maximum leakage in cavity 800 compared to a cavity comprising directly concatenated WDM and gain fiber sections is 50% smaller.

[0083] Similarly, a cladding pumped version of cavity 600 can be constructed. Cavity 900 shown in Fig. 11 displays such a cavity design. Fiber 901 is pumped via pump laser 902, which is coupled to fiber 901 via lens assembly 903 and 904 as well as V-groove 905. Alternatively, polarization-maintaining multi-mode fiber couplers or star-couplers could be used for pump power coupling. Such implementations are not separately shown. One end of the laser cavity is terminated with SAM assembly 906 (as discussed in regard to Figs. 1, 7 and 8), which is also used as the modelocking element. A single-polarization inside the laser is selected via all-fiber polarizer 907, which is spliced into the cavity via splices 908 and 909. Polarization-maintaining output coupler 910 is used for output coupling. The laser output is extracted via fiber end 911, which can further be spliced to additional amplifiers. Cavity mirror 912 terminates the second cavity end. Output coupler 910 can further be omitted and

the laser output can be obtained via a butt-coupled fiber pig-tail as explained with reference to Fig. 10.

[0084] The cavity designs discussed with respect to Figs. 1, 7, 8, 10 and 11 follow general design principles as explained with reference to Figs. 12a – 12c.

[0085] Fig. 12a shows a representative modelocked Fabry-Perot fiber laser cavity 1000, producing a linear polarization state oscillating inside the cavity containing one (or more) sections of non-polarization maintaining fiber 1001 and one (or more) sections of polarization maintaining fiber 1002, where the length of fiber section 1001 is sufficiently short so as not to degrade the linear polarization state inside the fiber laser cavity, more generally a predominantly linear polarization state is oscillating everywhere within the intracavity fiber. The fiber laser output can be obtained from cavity end mirrors 1003 or 1004 on either side of the cavity. To suppress the oscillation of one over the other linear polarization state inside the cavity, either fiber 1001 or 1002 has a polarization dependent loss at the emission wavelength.

[0086] Fig. 12b shows a representative modelocked Fabry-Perot fiber laser cavity 1005, producing a linear polarization state oscillating inside the cavity containing two (or more) sections of polarization maintaining fibers 1006, 1007, where the length of fiber sections 1006, 1007 is sufficiently long so as to prevent coherent interaction of short optical pulses oscillating inside the cavity and propagating along the birefringent axes of fibers 1006, 1007. Specifically, for an oscillating pulse with a FWHM width of τ , the group delay of the oscillating pulses along the two polarization axes of each fiber should be larger than τ . For oscillating chirped pulses τ represents the bandwidth-limited pulse width that corresponds to the oscillating pulse spectrum. Cavity 1005 also contains end mirrors 1008 and 1009 and can further contain sufficiently short sections of non-polarization maintaining fiber as discussed with reference to FIG. 12a.

[0087] FIG. 12c shows a representative modelocked Fabry-Perot fiber laser cavity 1010, producing a linear polarization state oscillating inside the cavity containing one (or more) sections of polarization maintaining fiber 1011, 1012 and one (or more) sections of polarizing fiber (or all-fiber polarizer) 1013, where the length of fiber sections 1011, 1013 is not sufficient to prevent coherent interaction of short optical pulses oscillating inside the

cavity and propagating along the birefringent axes of fibers 1011, 1013, where the polarizing fiber is sandwiched between the sections of short polarization maintaining fiber. Cavity 1010 further contains cavity end mirror 1014 and 1015 and can further contain short sections of non-polarization maintaining fiber as discussed with reference to FIG. 12a. Moreover, cavity 1010 (as well as 1000 and 1005) can contain bulk optic elements 1016, 1017 (or any larger number) randomly positioned inside the cavity to provide additional pulse control such as wavelength tuning or dispersion compensation. Note that the fibers discussed here can be single-clad, double-clad; the fibers can comprise also holey fibers or multi-mode fibers according to the system requirement. For example polarization maintaining holey fibers can be used for dispersion compensation, whereas multi-mode fibers can be used for maximizing the output pulse energy. Cavity mirrors 1014, 1015, 1003, 1004 and 1008, 1009 can further comprise bulk mirrors, bulk gratings or fiber gratings, where the fiber gratings can be written in short sections of non-polarization maintaining fiber that is short enough so as not to perturb the linear polarization state oscillating inside the cavity.

[0088] Fig. 13 serves as an example of a passively modelocked linear polarization cavity containing holey fiber for dispersion compensation. Cavity 1100 contains fiber 1101, side-pumping assembly 1102 (directing the pump light either into the cladding or the core of fiber 1101 as explained before), saturable absorber mirror assembly 1103, all fiber polarizer 1104 and fiber output coupler 1105 providing an output at fiber end 1106. All the above components were already discussed with respect to Fig. 8. In addition, a length of polarization maintaining holey fiber 1006 is spliced to the cavity for dispersion compensation and the cavity is terminated on the left hand side by mirror 1107.

[0089] Fig. 14 serves as another example of a passively modelocked linear polarization cavity containing a fiber grating for dispersion compensation as applied to the generation of ultra-stable spectral continua. System 1400 comprises a small modification of the cavity explained with respect to Fig. 7. System 1400 contains a fiber laser 1401 generating pulses with a bandwidth comparable to the spectral bandwidth of the fiber gain medium 1402. Fiber laser 1401 further comprises saturable absorber mirror assembly 1403, wide bandwidth fiber grating 1404, polarization maintaining wavelength division multiplexing (WDM) coupler 1405, which is used to direct pump laser 1406 into fiber gain

medium 1402. Pump laser 1406 is preferably single-mode to generate the least amount of noise.

[0090] To enable the oscillation of short pulses with a bandwidth comparable to the bandwidth of the gain medium 1402, saturable absorber mirror 1403 contains a bi-temporal saturable absorber, constructed with a bi-temporal life-time comprising a 1st short life-time of < 5 ps and a 2nd long life-time of > 50 ps. More preferable is a first life-time of < 1 ps, to allow pulse shaping of pulses as short as 100 fs and shorter. By selecting the penetration depth of the implanted ions into the saturable absorber, even tri-temporal saturable absorbers can be constructed.

[0091] The wide-bandwidth grating is preferably selected to approximately match the dispersion of the intra-cavity fibers. The wide-bandwidth grating can be made in short non-polarization maintaining fibers and it can be made also in polarization maintaining fibers. In order to suppress detrimental effects from cross coupling between the two polarization axes of the fiber grating, coupling to cladding modes in such large bandwidth fiber gratings should be suppressed. Gratings with suppressed coupling to cladding modes can be made in optical fibers with photosensitive core and cladding area, where the photosensitive cladding area is index-matched to the rest of the cladding. Such fiber designs are well known in the state of the art and can for example be manufactured with an appropriate selection of germania and fluorine doping in the core and cladding regions and such fiber designs are not further discussed here. Because of the large generated bandwidth, splicing of such polarization maintaining gratings to the rest of the cavity without coherent coupling between the linear polarization eigenmodes is no problem. Alternatively, the fiber gratings can be written directly into the photosensitive gain fiber, with an index and dopant profile that suppresses coupling to cladding modes in the fiber grating.

[0092] To sustain large spectral bandwidth, fiber grating 1404 has preferably a spectral bandwidth > 20 nm. A splice 1407 (or an equivalent bulk optic lens assembly) is used to connect the output of fiber laser 1401 to nonlinear fiber 1408 to be used for additional spectral broadening of the output of the fiber laser. For example fiber 1408 can comprise a highly nonlinear dispersion-flattened holo fiber. In conjunction with such fiber, smooth

broad-bandwidth spectral profiles with bandwidths exceeding 100 nm can be generated. These spectral outputs can be used directly in high precision optical coherence tomography.

[0093] The pulses at the output of fiber 1408 are generally chirped and a dispersion compensation module 1409 can be inserted after the output from fiber 1408 for additional pulse compression. The dispersion compensation module can be spliced directly to fiber end 1408 when optical fiber is used for dispersion compensation. Alternatively, the dispersion compensation module can comprise two (or one) bulk grating (or prism) pair(s). Such bulk optic elements for dispersion compensation are well known in the state of the art and are not further discussed here. Coupling into and out of a bulk dispersion compensating module is obtained via lenses 1410 and 1411. The pulses generated after pulse compression can be as short as 20 – 200 fs.

[0094] An additional highly nonlinear fiber 1412 (or a number of spliced together highly nonlinear fibers) is then used for the generation of the coherent spectral continuum. These spectral continua can be subsequently used in precision frequency metrology.

[0095] Note that the discussion with respect to Fig. 14 serves only as an example of the use of bi- or multi-temporal saturable absorbers in the generation of mass producible ultra-broad band, low noise spectral sources. Other modifications are obvious to anyone skilled in the art. These modifications can comprise for example the insertion of additional fiber amplifiers after the output of fiber laser 1401 and the construction of an integrated all-fiber assembly substituting elements 1408, 1409 - 1411 and 1412.

[0096] Though the discussion of the laser system with respect to Fig. 14 was based on the use of polarization maintaining fiber, non polarization maintaining fiber can also be used to produce pulses with bandwidth comparable to the bandwidth of the gain medium. In this case, saturable absorbers with depth controlled ion implantation are also of great value. Essentially, any of the prior art modelocked fiber laser systems described above (that were using saturable absorbers) can be improved with engineered bi- and multi- temporal saturable absorbers. Specifically, any of the cavity designs described in '427 and '848 to Fermann et al. can be used for the generation of ultra broadband optical pulses in conjunction with bi-or multi- temporal saturable absorbers and wide-bandwidth fiber Bragg gratings.

[0097] The above description of the preferred embodiments has been given by way of example. From the disclosure given, those skilled in the art will not only understand the present invention and its attendant advantages, but will also find apparent various changes and modifications to the structures and methods disclosed. It is sought, therefore, to cover all such changes and modifications as fall within the spirit and scope of the invention, as defined by the appended claims and equivalents thereof.